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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #12 (SO12)

(Conflict Reduced in Mindanao and Other Areas Vulnerable to Violence)

ARMM officials ask donors to continue funding for region

Governors of Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi say they'll push for sustained growth

By E. K. USMAN, A. G. MACABALANG & B. REBLANDO

Officials of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) led by the outgoing regional governor, Dr. Parouk S. Hussin have appealed to international donor agencies to provide more assistance to boost their drive for peace and economic development.

Together with Governors Wahab Akbar of Basilan, Benjamin Loong of Sulu and Sadikul Sahali of Tawi-Tawi, they made the appeal during last Thursday's Basulta forum at the Heritage Hotel in Pasay City.

Basulta stands for the three island provinces of the region — Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi— that grouped together to collectively advance their campaign to reduce poverty and contain lawless elements.

They belong to the top ring of Club 20, which is comprised of the 20 poorest provinces in the country.

Saying the ARMM has improved much compared to its violent past, Hussin appealed to international donor agencies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Canada International Development Agency (CIDA), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Australian Aid for International Development (AusAid) to continue providing assistance to the region even after he leaves his post.

Hussin will turn over the reins of ARMM's government to Zaldy "Datu Puti" Ampatuan, his successor, on September 30.

Hussin said while the government has supported his leadership, the resources coming from the national government are not enough to

address the region's, and people's, development needs.

Thus, the international community plays a pivotal role in sustaining the gains of his administration and in boosting the socio-economic development projects in the future, the outgoing governor said.

Akbar noted the improving peace and order situation in his province, once the favorite playground of the notorious Abu Sayyaf bandit group.

"All your development projects have a space in Basilan and they are all welcome. But I prefer that focus be made on planting rubber trees to improve our people's dire economic condition," said Akbar, whose tough response against the Abu Sayyaf sent the kidnap gang to flee and relocate their operations in other areas within ARMM.

Sahali said with the support of the foreign community, "we can achieve peace, development and prosperity."

The governors presented to potential donor partners 150 development projects in agriculture, health, basic education, water supply and environmental sustainability.

Ted Hazard, chief of party of the Management Sciences for Health, lauded Basulta's efforts, saying that by working together, ARMM provincial officials and local leaders stand a better chance of succeeding.

"I am here to learn. I applaud them for their effort, standing together. It is nice to see them working together," said Hazard, whose group is implementing a USAID project on family planning and health care in ARMM.

(Source: Manila Bulletin, 9/18/05, page F4)